



**Minutes on D-E NCA Advisory Council, May 4, 2011**  
**Delta Center for the Performing Arts, Delta, CO**

All Advisory Council members present except for Jason Beason of Paonia, and Joe Neuhoof of Grand Junction.  
 Those attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Vice-Chair William (Bill) Harris of Montrose
- Jan McCracken of Delta.
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Tamera Minnick of Grand Junction
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction

BLM staff attending: Katie Stevens, Ben Blom, and Brodie Farquhar.

Public audience: Janice Shepherd, Lee Gelatt, Sherry Schenk, Nate Green, Kay Simonsen, Steve Smith, Eric Rechel, Conrad Tucker and Mary Tucker, and Charlie Sharp.

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. and noted there was a quorum.  
 D-E NCA Manager Katie Stevens, the designated federal official for the council, discussed the last meeting: At that meeting, the Council started by focusing broadly, with an overview of all resources in this zone, before decided to narrow the focus down to more specific management questions at this meeting. Recreation is the primary issue for this zone that the Council chose to focus on.

**Pre-Meeting Reminders**

Reminders: The Council is now meeting the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

The meeting on the first Wednesday meeting will be in Delta at the Performing Arts Center (822 Grand Ave)  
 The meeting on the third Wednesday of the month will always be in Grand Junction, at the Mesa County Annex.

Times are 3-6:30 p.m.

**Public comment (Round 1)**

Comments from the Quiet Users Group (represented in comments by Janice Shepherd and Lee Gelatt)

- Quiet Trails Group: A coalition of equestrians, hikers, the Sierra Club, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and other conservation groups. Quiet Trails advocates for non-motorized trails. Defined as essentially non-motorized, including those who like to hike, paint, photograph, view birds and other wildlife, mountain bikers, hunters, trail runners, dog-walkers, horseback riders, fishing on river. May or may not include camping, most camping seems to be based on motorized access.

- Reminder: The NCA was set up to protect multiple resources and this group can support any plan that protects the resources. Any recreational activity has an impact on the land and resources.
- Interested in quiet trails, not looking to exclude other forms of recreation from Zone 1
- Reminder (Shepherd): Consider 10-15 years from now?
  - If a huge increase in recreation usage occurs, then things need to change. Example: designated camping along Colorado River toward Moab based on increased use and issues with sustainability. Too many people camped along river and it was not a sustainable situation. The solution was to build new campgrounds.
  - Consider a permit system if recreational activities become too busy.
  - Noted a paraglider landing zone that had been cleared of rocks and brush on the southern edge of the Hunting Grounds—concern for cultural resources.

Eric Rechel (representing wildlife)

- BLM should look at the southern half of the Hunting Grounds—vicinity of Escalante Creek. White tailed prairie dog colonies could be affected by recreational use
- Woodsy spots and campgrounds should be blocked
- Work with the Colorado Department of Wildlife, to see how antelope are doing in Zone 1.

Nate Green (Western Slope ATV Association)

- Make better use of the trails that exist now—create trail loops when possible from two individual spurs. Consider leaving Zone 1 as is.

In response to public comments, the Council discussed how marketing can drive and increase recreational usage in D-E NCA.

- Unauthorized paraglider landing zones noted as law enforcement issue.
- Minnick: people will come to D-E NCA, so we better have a plan, not just to deal for current use, but be prepared for future growth.
- Steele said she was surprised that fellow visitors to Glacier National Park, in Montana, this past summer know about D-E NCA and want to see it.
- Wilson said BLM should be prepared for the unexpected – he found model aircraft fans dog-fighting above Blue Mesa reservoir.

### **Recreation Planning Process**

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Blom walked the Council through the recreation planning process, and where travel management fits in, touching on the following points:

Recreation brings beneficial outcomes for individuals, community and the environment, improves quality of life, and potentially the environment. Tradeoffs (impacts on the environment) as well.

Different levels at which BLM can manage recreation (low to high, with increasing commitment and funding)

- Provide opportunities, such as access.
- Manage lands to reduce conflicts.
- Manage for public safety and land health (sustainable trails)

Higher levels of management include:

- Manage for and protect particular settings, such as solitude. Build facilities, install signage.
- Protect a specific type of beneficial outcome (can restrict other activities that would interfere)

Wilderness Act defines what BLM and visitors can do inside the Dominguez Wilderness Area

Recreation can have impacts on other resources – even solitary hikers in wilderness.

- Vandalism to rock art, unsustainable routes, effects to Colorado hookless cactus in the Hunting Grounds. Impacts on private property, such as dumping trash or leaving gates open.
- Bangs Canyon is an example of an area with a high density of archeological sites, where recreation facilities were desired but ultimately there had to be tradeoffs with recreation to protect cultural.

## **Process for travel management planning**

Comes after:

- Goals and objectives identified for recreation
- Goals and objectives for other resources and resource uses
- Mgmt actions and allowable uses for both recreation and other resources

Travel system supports all these decisions: Areas where use of motorized vehicles will be limited, as well as individual decisions for routes to be open, closed, or limited (limits may be placed on season of use (e.g., to protect elk calving areas), or to a particular type of use, or to administrative or wildfire-fighting use).

Blom noted that while the Forest Service does not have open travel areas, the BLM does, but the Omnibus Act limits travel within D-E NCA to designated routes – NO open areas.

Discussion:

- BLM is working on an inventory of trails and roads.
- Routes can be designated or expanded to create loops or links to scenic sites.
- Crypto-biotic soils are so fragile that no one – not even hikers or horse riders – should cut across country. Travel restrictions are not just for motorized vehicles.

## **Developing alternatives**

BLM is developing a range of alternatives, now through October.

The alternatives typically considered include the no action (Continue Current Management) plus three or four others.

A reasonable alternative should be feasible from an economic, logistical, social and environmental perspective. A range of alternatives might be created by analyzing different alternatives with varying levels of management intensity—e.g., high profile management catering to destination tourists, versus locals or no commitment to anyone. How that played out in McInnis NCA is that Mack Ridge – a popular mountain biking area – is managed for locals and destination tourists who would likely rent a hotel room.

There is a distinction in timing between now, where the Council will provide input on this range of alternatives (e.g., what BLM could do, with various options identified) and later, when discussion will focus on the Preferred Alternative (e.g., what BLM should do, in the view of the Council).

## **Basic question for Zone 1**

Stevens asked, should BLM make a specific commitment toward recreation in Zone 1?

A Connector Trail, linking Grand Junction to Delta, is important to the economy and visitor centers.

- Most of trail exists now, with a few critical gaps in private property.
- Delta and Riverfront both have plans for connector trail

Old Spanish Trail is being identified on the ground. Very fragile. Parallel trail is best to avoid damage.

- Suitable for retracing on foot and horseback, NOT by motor vehicle—may not want anyone on the actual trail path.
- Suitable for interpretation, Heritage Tourism

In determining level of commitment to recreation, one option/alternative should look pretty much like it does now, with adjustments as needed to protect the NCA's purposes.

- Designate OHV trails, cut off spurs to nowhere or redundant trails to same points. Emphasize converting trails to loops where appropriate.
- Look for signs of erosion to indicate poorly designed or nonsustainable trails. Fix or close.
- Partner with recreation groups willing to contribute money and labor.

- D-E NCA: not a national **recreation** area, but is a national **conservation** area.

Quiet trails needed, but advocates also willing to share trails. (Convert closed roads/trails to quiet trails?)

Advisory Council does not, at this point, see a need for recreation to be made the primary purpose for Zone 1

#### **Public comment**

Tucker said ATV groups are eager to facilitate Council visits to D-E NCA, and just need a few days notice.

Janice Shepherd

- Important to limit hikers to trails in some spots.
- Thanks to the Council for voicing the need for a glass ban in D-E NCA.
- Remember that target shooting is having an impact on this area, both safety and trash. Consider very limited designated areas, or closing.
- Recommends dispersed camping spots: Enjoys solitude- so consider widely placed, designated dispersed sites.

Rechel:

- Consider option of saying all roads are closed, unless designated as open.
- Consider peregrine falcons and prairie dog colonies if Rim Trail is considered—putting it through WTPD colonies could lead to more shooting.

A Bean Ranch Road resident spoke about his perceptions:

- 98 percent of Zone 1 recreational activity is motorized.
- Paintballers should have a place to go.

Nate Green:

- Motorized recreation is not the only source of erosion in D-E NCA. Consider effects, not methods of travel.
- Suggested that several small parking lots in Zone 1 would be better than one big lot.

#### **Next meeting**

The next meeting, May 18, will be at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex, in Grand Junction. The focus of the meeting will be the Gunnison River Zone.